

MATTREYI

A STORY ILLUSTRATING

The Theology and Social Life of Vedic Hindus

PANDIT SIVANATH TATTVABHUSHAN

Author of "The Vedanta and Its Relation to
Modern Thought," "Hindu Theism," etc.

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MADRAS

MAITREYI

A VEDIC STORY.

CHAPTER I.

ADMIRATION.

 O understand my story, the reader must, whether he be in Madras or elsewhere, transplant himself in imagination to Behar. He must also avail himself of the same conveyance in going over a period of about four thousand years, for I am speaking of a time when those far-off events were occurring which furnished materials for the composition of the Upanishads, and which we find recorded in these ancient treatises. Let us take our stand in the outskirts of the ancient city of Janakpur in Mithila—let us rather fly about in the air on the wings of fancy around the city, for that would give us a broader outlook and enable us better to see what is taking place around us. Janakpur—I need scarcely remind the reader—was the city of the royal sage, *Rajarishi*, who was

the greatest patron of learning in ancient times and the friend and theological associate of the sage Yajnavalkya. Later legends also describe him as the father of Sita and the father-in-law of Rama. Let us, as I have already proposed, fly about in the air on a rather desolate plain, interspersed with hillocks, in the outskirts of the ancient city of Janaka. It is a fine summer morning, the day only an hour-and-a-half old. We see three travellers slowly making their way towards the city through the plain. All the three are tall and strongly built—very different from the present inhabitants of Behar. Two of them are armed in the fashion of those days, each having a bow in hand, a case of arrows slung on the back, and a sheathed sword hanging from the waist. A single glance would be enough to show the class to which they belong—the Kshatriya. The third person, by the simplicity and neatness of his dress, the grave earnestness of his face, and the exquisite purity of his speech, could easily be recognised as a learned Brahmana. He is, in fact, no less a personage than the sage Mitra, a most trusted minister of Janaka, and is just returning to his home in

Janakpur, under the escort of the warriors, after discharging some important mission entrusted by the king in a neighbouring town. About the rank and duties of the two Kshatriyas, we shall learn more as our story proceeds. At the present moment let us hear a part of the conversation in which the three travellers seem absorbed. One of the Kshatriyas addresses the sage and says :

“Revered Sir, since my return from Benares, I have been marking a peculiar anxiety in your face. Even now I observe that your mind is wandering and getting listless in the midst of our talk. If you have no objection to speaking out to us, we shall be highly obliged by your letting us know the cause of your anxiety.”

Mitra.—“Yajnadatta, there is nothing that I would hide from you and Vishnumitra. Vishnumitra marked my anxiety on the very next day after the great meeting and inquired into its cause. I told him I would speak to him later on, but have not hitherto got an opportunity. Now that I have got both of you together, and can speak undisturbed, I have no objection to opening my mind to you.”

Yajnadatta.—"What great meeting do you speak of? I was away and have heard nothing about it. When I started for Benares, I saw preparations going on in the palace for a great *Yajna*. Do you refer to any meeting connected with the ceremony?"

Vishnumitra.—"Your absence has made you a great loser. I have never seen another meeting like that, nor have ever heard of anything similar." *

Yajnadatta.—"Which of our learned men spoke at the meeting?"

Vishnumitra.—"None of the more eminent ones was silent, but the lady Gargi's speech and that of the sage *Yajnavalkya* in reply to her questions are the most worthy of mention."

Yajnadatta.—"What was the subject of discussion?"

Vishnumitra.—"No particular subject was fixed beforehand. Those present put various questions to the sage on a variety of subjects. They were like a torrent of rain in the rainy season. He had

* The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Chapter III.

to touch upon different subjects in answering these questions. The lady Gargi questioned him on the all-pervasiveness of Brahman, and the sage Uddalaka on Brahman as the Inner-Ruler (Antaryamin). As soon as I get leisure, I shall speak to you in detail about those questions and the substance of Yajnavalkya's answers to them. I have never before or since heard such a beautiful exposition of the Divine nature as he gave on the occasion."

Yajnadatta.—"What led the others to attack him?"

Mitra.—"He had acted rather indiscreetly at first, and that was what led to the attack. However, its result was very good. On no other occasion did Yajnavalkya's learning and spiritual experience shine forth so brightly as in that memorable meeting. He is yet a young man, only thirty. If such is the splendour of his genius in the prime of his life, how great will it be when he attains the fulness of manhood! It is a wonder how the sage Vaishampayana could quarrel with such a worthy disciple of his, and deprive of the rights of a

pupil.”*

Yajnadatta.—“ I don't think that will injure Yajnavalkya any way. Nor will it cause any loss to us. Yajnavalkya was right in characterising the Veda taught by Vāishampayana as the ‘ Black Yajurveda.’* I have heard that Veda from some of his pupils. Text and comment, *Mantra* and *Brahmana*, are so strangely mixed up in it that its study is like entering a dark room. Such a Veda might very well be called ‘ black.’ I hope the ‘ White Yajurveda,’ which the sage is now compiling with your help, will deserve its name. However, I have a mind to inquire more particularly about it on another occasion. Be good enough to tell me now why the ‘ torrent’ of questions that Vishnumitra speaks of, was poured upon Yajnavalkya.”

Mitra.—“ The king enclosed a thousand cows, with their horns encased in gold-leaves, near the

* This refers to the circumstances that led to the division of the Yajurveda into two *sakhas* or branches, *Krishna* (black) and *Shukla* (white), the former associated with the name of Vāishampayana and the latter with that of Yajnavalkya. See for details the introduction to the author's English edition of the *Upanishads*.

place of meeting, and said to those assembled :
 “Ye, venerable Brahmanas, let him who is the wisest (*Brahmishtha*) among you, drive away these cows.”

Yajnadatta.—“Strange ! Who would have the immodesty to declare himself the wisest ? ”

Mitra.—“ So I said that Yajnavalkya acted rather indiscreetly at first. You know how fond he is of cows. It has grown into a weakness in him. When he saw that all were silent and no one claimed the cows, he said to one of his pupils :
 “ My dear boy, drive these cows to my house. ”

Yajnadatta.—“ Oh ! How strange ! ”

Mitra.—“ His conduct indeed seemed strange to all, and there was an angry though suppressed talk throughout the assembly. At last Asyala, the Hotri priest of Janaka, gave vent to his angry feeling and addressed Yajnavalkya thus : ‘ Do you really think, Sir, that you are the wisest among us ? ’ Yajnavalkya said : ‘ I bow down before the wisest, but I wish indeed to have these cows. Perhaps you would have no objection to my having them if I could answer all questions put to me. I should be very glad to be questioned ? ’ This was

the signal for the 'torrent' of questions to which Vishnumitra refers. You may, at your leisure, hear the whole matter from him."

Yajnadatta.—"I shall certainly do so, but be good enough now to answer my main question. I have been forgetting it in inquiring about the meeting. What is the cause of your anxiety and what has it to do with the meeting we have been talking about?"

Mitra.—"The cause of my anxiety is my daughter. She is now eighteen, and I should be glad to give her away in marriage. But I have failed in this."

Vishnumitra.—"What can your failure mean? It is rare to find a girl so beautiful and excellent as your daughter. And then you have given her an education which scarcely any other young lady amongst us has received. I have often said to my friends that Maitreyi will very soon grow into a lady scholar and orator as eminent as her aunt, Gargi. Can there be any difficulty in finding a match for such an accomplished lady? Our city is full of learned young men."

Mitra.—"There is no dearth of learned and

well-behaved young men. My failure in giving away Maitreyi is not due to that. Maitreyi's education, which you have so much praised, stands in the way of her marriage."

Yajnadatta.—"How?"

Mitra.—"You know that since his separation from Vaishampayana, Yajnavalkya has been busy, with myself in compiling a new Yajurveda. The small body of compilers meets every day in my house. In these meetings we often put off our chief work and discuss spiritual topics, such as the nature of Brahman, the mode of worshipping Him, and so on. These discussions prove so delightful and edifying to us that deep absorption in them often makes us forget food and sleep. Gargi attends these meetings very frequently. You know my daughter is deeply attached to my sister-in-law. Wherever her aunt goes, she must go as a matter of course. She followed her even to that great meeting, which brought together learned men from all parts of the country. She could not, indeed, sit near Gargi, but had to sit with the other ladies on the right wing of the great square, for Gargi had her seat in the inmost

ring of the square, among the most learned of the guests. However, what I have to say about my daughter is this: I did not know that such a young girl as she understood anything about the subjects of our discussion. But I now see she spends almost the whole day in thinking and speaking about these matters. This is what prevents her marriage."

Vishnumitra.—"How can *your* daughter be other than what you describe her to be? There is nothing strange in her becoming a theologian at eighteen. I see that my prophecy is going to be fulfilled. Do you mean that she wishes to be a *Brahmacharini* like her aunt?"

Mitra.—"Very nearly. She says: 'I shall either take the vow of celibacy like Aunt Gargi, or if you can make it possible, I shall marry Yajnavalkya.' This idea has taken a strong hold of her mind ever since that great meeting. You see now what the meeting has to do with my anxiety."

Yajnadatta.—"I see; but I don't quite understand your difficulty. It seems to me that Yajnavalkya will only be too glad to accept your daughter's hands."

Mitra.—"You say so only because you don't know Yajnavalkya's domestic life. Perhaps you know so far that he is a married man. He has married the daughter of my esteemed friend Katya. This young lady is a worthy wife of Yajnavalkya in almost all respects. She is a most beautiful woman, very skilful in household management, and possesses, above all, such a soft and sweet disposition that once seen and spoken to, she can never be forgotten. Whenever I visit Yajnavalkya's house, she greets me in such sweet terms and her face is brightened with such a beautiful smile, in which modesty mingles with heartfelt reverence, that I cannot avoid thinking of her as a goddess in human shape. I understand that Yajnavalkya is deeply attached to this excellent wife. I cannot think of impairing this domestic happiness by bringing about a second marriage, even if he should be induced to contract one. Specially my daughter is young and inexperienced. I cannot be sure that she will always act discreetly."

Vishnumitra.—"You used an 'almost' in describing the lady Katayani. Will you kindly tell

me what you mean by it?"

Mitra.—(Smiling.) "In saying that Kātyayani is a worthy wife of our young sage, in *almost* all respects, I mean that though accomplished in all other ways, she feels no interest in theological subjects. She is always busy with household matters, serving her husband and looking after her children. She has no learned inquisitiveness like my daughter and sister-in-law."*

Yajnadatta.—"Then I see there is room enough in Yajnavalkya's house for our Maitreyi. She would fill up that portion of his happiness which the lady Kātyayani has left unfilled."

Mitra.—"To fill up that portion or leave it unfilled is Yajnavalkya's own concern. Why should other people meddle with it?"

Even while uttering the last sentence, Mitra stopped and gazed awe-struck towards a certain direction. Long before this the travellers had entered a woody and somewhat narrow path lined with hillocks. A few moments back Mitra, while still speaking, had marked a solitary figure on the


* The *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*, II. 4 and IV. 4.

top of a hillock with a beautiful ring of trees around it. He had marked the figure, had observed that it was that of a man absorbed in meditation, and was trying to recognise him. What now arrested Mitra's course was the recognition that the person on the hilltop was no other than Yajnavalkya and the instantaneous discovery that the sage was in danger. A huge tiger was leering at him and approaching him with slow steps while the sage, with his senses quite closed against the outer world, knew nothing of the dreadful intruder. Mitra immediately pointed out the danger to the Kshatriyas. In a moment they took an arrow each and aimed it at the tiger. The arrows pierced the eyes of the animal and made him motionless. They shot again and fixed two more arrows on his breast. The next moment they came up to the prostrate beast and cut it in two with their swords. Its dying howl disturbed the sage's meditation and made him open his eyes. He realised the whole affair at a glance and in deep gratitude touched the feet of the old sage and embraced the Kshatriyas. He thanked them again and again for the wonderful deliver-

ance they had effected. The place, however, was felt as too unsafe to loiter in even with the brave and strong escort of the warriors, and they hurried to the city with quick steps and parted from one another as one by one they neared their respective homes.

CHAPTER II.

THE CO-WIVES.

 HE event recorded in the last part of the first chapter did not directly help the fulfilment of Mitra's desire. If he had been a low-minded man, he would have proposed his daughter's marriage with Yajnavalkya as a reward for saving his life. The social condition of the country in those days was such, that, under such favourable circumstances no impropriety would be felt in offering a beautiful and accomplished bride to a man even if he were married, and the man to whom such an offer would be made, would rather be pleased with it. Such would really be the case with ordinary men. But the reader must have seen, from what he has learnt in the first chapter, that Mitra and Yajnavalkya were both extraordinary men; so the union of Maitreyi with the latter was not easily effected. The direct effect, however, of the tiger incident was a deepening of friendship between the two sages, which again led to an

exchange of visits between the female members of the two families. One great result of this was, that a close friendship grew up between Maitreyi and Katyayani. To understand my story well, the reader must know a little more about these ladies than what he has already been told. They were nearly of the same age, Katyayani being only two or three years older than her friend. But their natures were, in almost all respects, opposite to one another. And it was this oppositeness that lay at the bottom of their fondness for each other. Each saw in the other what was lacking in each and was thereby drawn to her. Katyayani had a heart easily inclined to love. The loveable had only to present itself to her, and her heart rushed to it. She was of an extremely emotional character : her face brightened with smiles the moment she saw an object of love, and her eyes filled with tears as soon as she saw or heard anything to sadden her. Her mind was somewhat light and shallow ; she could spend hours in amusement and in hearing stories, but she could not attend for any length of time to such serious subjects as her husband dealt with. But she had nevertheless

a strong sense of duty, a deep reverence for her husband and the tenderest affection for the two little children with which she had up to this time been blessed. She spent almost the whole day in minding her husband's comforts and in bringing up her children, and her home was a model for order and neatness. In several respects, Maitreyi's character was the very opposite of the one I have just described. She had indeed a capacity for love, but her love was practically confined to a chosen few. Her eyes and ears seemed to be turned inside, so that outward sights or sounds, whether lovely or unlovely, could not easily move her heart. Her face wore a gravity and earnestness much beyond her years. Amusements, talks and stories, the common delight of women, were not indeed unpleasant to her; but they could not occupy her long; she spent most of her time in the study of serious subjects, specially those of a metaphysical nature. She attended to only as much of the household duties of her father's house as she felt called upon to attend to; she had really no liking for such duties. However, a deep friendship, as I have

already said, grew up between these two women of opposite natures. Katyayani specially, as might be expected, grew very fond of Maitreyi: meeting with her became one of her greatest pleasures, and parting from her one of her greatest pains. One day the following conversation took place between them:—

Katyayani.—"I often think what will become of me when you are married. The marriage of each of my sisters has proved a great trial to me. But separation from them has now become just bearable. Parting from you will perhaps kill me."

Maitreyi.—"You need not think of parting from me. We shall never part."

Katyayani.—"What do you mean? If you happen to be married near me, we shall indeed meet frequently. But how can I hope that your home will be near?"

Maitreyi.—"How do you know that I shall be married at all?"

Katyayani.—"You to remain unmarried! The idea is strange. Many will seek your hand."

Maitreyi.—"What if I encourage none of them?"

Katyayani.—"Why? do you wish to be a *Brahmucharini*. I don't like the practice. It seems to me that domestic life is the proper sphere of women."

Maitreyi.—"Domestic life is the proper sphere not only of women, but of men also. But when people speak of that life as woman's proper sphere, they seem to mean that she has no other duties than those that are called domestic."

Katyayani.—"What other duties can a woman have? Religious duties? They are included in the domestic. Helping at sacrifices, praising the gods, vows, fasting and the like—every married woman has to discharge these duties."

Maitreyi.—"Can you conceive of no duties for women beyond these? Is not acquiring the knowledge of the Self (*atmajñānam*) an important duty?"

Katyayani.—"Yes, that is the duty of the learned. But how many learned women are there? It is only ladies like your aunt, who have time and ability enough for such pursuits, that can strive for acquiring self-knowledge. It is mainly the duty of men."

Maitreyi.—"It is only in men that the Self exists, or is it in women also?"

Katyayani.—(Smiling.) "Certainly in women also, otherwise how could we see, hear and understand?"

Maitreyi.—"Is it equally in both, or more in men than in women?"

Katyayani.—(Smiling again.) "Equally in both. There is no difference between the sexes in this respect."

Maitreyi.—"And there is no liberation without the knowledge of the Self—Yajnavalkya's wife does not need to learn this from me."

Katyayani.—"No, I have heard this too."

Maitreyi.—"And is it also true that liberation is worth attaining both for men and women?"

Katyayani.—"Yes, there is no doubt about it."

Maitreyi.—"Then why are women so forgetful of liberation and why do they think of the pursuit of knowledge as the special duty of men? Women should indeed mind domestic duties, just as men attend to the acquisition of wealth and other worldly duties. But the difference is that while men, notwithstanding their worldly duties, do not

forget that the attainment of liberation is the main end of life ; women, when they have done their domestic duties, think they have done everything required of them. Can self-forgetfulness go further ?”

Katyayani.—“ You are quite right, my dear. Your words seem to open my eyes. The difference of sex makes the worldly duties of men and women somewhat different. But there is no such difference in the Self. The same great Self is in all—so I have heard—therefore it is equally the duty of both man and woman to strive after self-knowledge—after the attainment of liberation. Your words have made this truth clear to me to-day. My husband told me all this long ago, but I did not understand him then. I now see that it is their own fault that women do not try to acquire the knowledge of higher subjects. I am specially to blame. My opportunities are great, and yet I am doing nothing.”

Maitreyi.—“ You are most fortunate. It is by the accumulated merit of many virtuous lives that you have got such a husband. I wonder how women, specially those of the higher classes, who

are allowed to choose their own husbands, come to select only wealthy and pleasure-loving young men as the partners of their lives. Why don't they seek such learned, thoughtful and saintly men as your husband—such as may help them in attaining liberation?"

At this stage of the conversation one of Katyayani's men-servants arrived with a palankeen and being admitted into the presence of the ladies, said to his mistress: "Madam, your children and their nurse think you have been too long away from home, and wish your immediate return. The day is nearly spent and your palankeen is ready. What are your orders?" Katyayani rose as she heard this. It was the first time in her life, that she had spent such a long time in conversation on spiritual matters. Now the very mention of her children and the thought that so many things at home required her care and supervision, made her mind restless, and taking a hasty leave of her friends at Mitra's house, she hurried home under the escort of her servants.

While busy in household duties, Katyayani

could not but turn her thoughts to the important conversation she had with Maitreyi. Its more thoughtful portion, however, became gradually more and more dim and hazy to her. But her mind turned again and again to that portion of it, in which Maitreyi had condemned the bad selection of husbands by high-class women in general, and expressed deep admiration for her own husband. She connected this with Maitreyi's expressed desire not to marry and with what little she had heard from the other female members of Mitra's family about Maitreyi's disinclination to marriage. 'All this naturally led her to ask herself: "Can it be that Maitreyi would be glad to be my husband's wife? Ah! what a beautiful union would it have been! What a help would each have been to the other's liberation! I am a most unworthy wife of Yajnavalkya!" But these feelings continued only as long as the union of Maitreyi and Yajnavalkya seemed something that might have been, but was now impossible. When, however, from certain indications she found out that in some quarters it was thought of as something quite possible, and

even as something that ought to be promoted, a struggle of a serious nature began in her soul. Its character can be better imagined than described. It made her restless for days and weeks, but at last her soul triumphed over it. How full and glorious the triumph was, will appear from her subsequent conduct.

She had not yet mentioned the matter in her conversations with her husband. But she had been observing that ever since the tiger incident, two gentlemen, whom she did not know personally, came to see her husband very often and had sometimes long conversations with him. They were no other than the two Kshatriyas who had saved his life. One day, seeing him closeted with Vishnumitra for hours, and guessing from some signs that the conversation related to Maitreyi, she inquired of him about its purport; which resulted in a long conference between husband and wife. We shall hear a part of what they said to each other:

Yajñavalkya.—"How strange! Have you no objection to this?"

Katyayani.—"Far from having any objection.

I have told you plainly I shall be very happy if it takes place. I shall rather be sorry if you give up the idea."

Yajñavalkya.—"Will you not be jealous of her?"

Katyayani.—"If I had any doubt of the depth of your love for me, I might have been jealous. As matters stand now, I feel no jealousy."

Yajñavalkya.—"How do you know that I shall not come to love her more than you by-and-by?"

Katyayani.—"You have told me plainly the nature of your feelings for her."

Yajñavalkya.—"They may be gradually changed. They may become deeper."

Katyayani.—"I am prepared for that change. I shall not feel myself wronged if it does take place. She deserves to be loved more. And, after all, loving this or that person is not for the sake of the person, but for the Absolute that is in all—as you have often said." I don't quite understand these abstruse matters, as you know. But, my recent struggles have led me to resolve that, as your wife, I must try to rise above my petty

* The *Bṛihadaranyaka Upaniṣad*, II. 4, and IV. 4.


selfish feelings. However, the exact attitude of my mind in regard to this matter is, that though you may marry a second wife, you will never be able to love her more than me. "

Yajnavalkya.—(Smiling.) "Your confidence in your own loveableness seems rather extreme. However, I would not shake it even if I could."

There were many more such conferences between husband and wife before the final conclusion was reached. These conferences showed that Katya-yani was more willing to have a co-wife than Yajnavalkya to have a second wife. She must have been a strange woman, and I must condemn her. And with the light that four thousand years have shed on me, I must condemn Yajnavalkya the more for being a bigamist. But we must see him as he was and as he thought; and this is what I have tried to do. The marriage took place just two years after the events related in our first chapter

CHAPTER III.

KNOWLEDGE OF SELF AND NOT-SELF.

 HE reader must now be prepared for a little metaphysical discussion, which will occupy us throughout two chapters. He who has no liking for such discussions may leave these two chapters out and turn to the succeeding ones for the sequel of the story. But these dry chapters are not without occasional touches upon the character of the two wives of Muni Yajñavalkya, touches which may interest even unphilosophical readers.

About a fortnight after Maitreyi's marriage, the Muni was one evening sitting with his wives in an apartment of his house which he called the *Tapogriha*, the chamber of meditation. The purpose for which it was set apart may be guessed from its name. The evening sacrifice was just over, and the house was yet full of the smoke rising out of the altar and the odour of the incense burned therein. The *Tapogriha*, however, was

a well-ventilated room, and the smoke soon left it and made its way towards the celestial regions for which it was intended. All the three persons present in the room seemed to await its escape with some impatience. They were not loth to give the gods their due. They indeed gave it with scrupulous regularity and punctuality notwithstanding Yajnavalkya's somewhat hard feelings for the gods.* But they were not contented with such ceremonials, and so, having satisfied the gods, they now turned to their souls, which no sacrifices could touch, and sought their satisfaction in the Unseen and Untouched. It was Maitreyi who opened the conversation.

Maitreyi.—"That subject *must* be taken up to-day."

Katyayani.—"What subject? and what do you mean by the stress on your 'must'?"

Yajnavalkya.—"Maitreyi wants an exposition of the unity of the Self, and the stress on her 'must' means that ever since her marriage she has

* The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1-4-10.

been asking for a discussion of the subject, but for some cause or other it has had to be put off."

Katyayani.—"Why not first discuss the question 'what is the Self'? before a discussion of its unity?"

Maitreyi.—"I have no need to inquire about the matter."

Katyayani.—"But I have. Tell me what the Self is."

Yajnavalkya.—"Why not try to give your own answer to your question?"

Katyayani.—"I think the Self is that which has life."

Yajnavalkya.—"What is life? What are its functions? That is, what do we do because we have life?"

Katyayani.—"As having life we breathe air in and out."

Yajnavalkya.—"Eating, drinking, digestion and the like are also functions of life."

Katyayani.—"Then the Self is that which breathes, eats, drinks, digests and does such other things."

Yajnavalkya.—"But suppose such a thing as

you conceive as the Self should feel no pleasure and pain, would you call it a Self."

Katyayani.—"No, in that case I would call such a thing only a living being, but not a Self."

Yajñavalkya.—"Then you see that your definition of a Self is incorrect."

Katyayani.—"I see I cannot call that a Self which has no consciousness."

Yajñavalkya.—"What is consciousness?"

Katyayani.—"Consciousness is knowing."

Yajñavalkya.—"Give examples of knowing."

Katyayani.—"For example, my seeing you and Maitreyi and hearing what you say."

Yajñavalkya.—"Do you always see what you are now seeing and hear what you are now hearing?"

Katyayani.—"No, I don't see you if I close my eyes or move away from this place, and don't hear when you are silent or when I close my ears."

Yajñavalkya.—"But you continue to have consciousness even then?"

Katyayani.—"Yes, I do."

Yajñavalkya.—"Consciousness then continues even when the actions of the five senses are stopped?"

Katyayani.—"Yes, it does continue."

Yajnavalkya.—"What do we know then? Who or what is then the object of consciousness?"

Katyayani.—"We then know ourselves."

Yajnavalkya.—"Consciousness, then, consists in knowing ourselves?"

Katyayani.—"Not in knowing ourselves alone, in knowing sensuous objects also."

Yajnavalkya.—"But you have said that consciousness continues even when sensuous objects are not known."

Katyayani.—"Yes, I said this."

Yajnavalkya.—"But knowing ourselves is necessary for consciousness. There can be no consciousness without it."

Katyayani.—"I don't quite see this. Consciousness is sometimes concerned with sensuous objects, and sometimes with the Self. We sometimes know sensuous objects and sometimes ourselves only?"

Maitreyi.—"Don't we know ourselves when we know sensuous objects?"

Katyayani.—"We may or may not."

Maitreyi.—"We must. When I see the Muni I cannot but think that *I am seeing him.*"

Katyayani.—"I don't know what sort of seeing you see. As for myself, when I see him, I forget myself altogether."

The Muni could not avoid a smile at this compliment. It was this self-forgetful love of Katyayani that enamoured him of her. But he had also deep faith in Maitreyi's sincere reverence and admiration for him. Whatever Maitreyi did, she did with the fullest self-consciousness. She was a soul completely roused up. Whereas Katyayani had only just commenced to think of herself. However the conversation went on uninterrupted.

Yajnavalkya.—"Well, Katyayani, when you know only yourself and no sensuous objects, do you remember the latter?"

Katyayani.—"Yes, I sometimes do."

Yajnavalkya.—"You remember having known them once?"

Katyayani.—"Yes, I remember having known them once."

Yajnavalkya.—"That is, you remember yourself as having known them."

Katyayani.—"Yes."

Yajnavalkya.—"How is it that you remember something which you did not know?"

Katyayani.—"Did not know? What did I not know?"

Maitreyi.—"Did you not say that sometimes in knowing sensuous objects you did not know yourself, and that in seeing the Muni you forgot yourself?"

Katyayani.—"Yes, I did say that. But what inconsistency is there in saying that though I forget myself sometimes in knowing other objects, I yet remember myself afterwards?"

Maitreyi.—"One cannot remember what one never knows. Recollection is only the re-appearance of knowledge."

Katyayani.—"Do you mean to say that because in knowing sensuous objects I did not know myself as their knower, therefore it is impossible for me to remember myself as their knower?"

Maitreyi.—"Yes, that is what I mean; and since in remembering sensuous objects you do remember yourself as their knower, it is proved that you do know yourself as their knower when you perceive them."

Katyayani.—"Oh, I see! But it is rather strange, and I cannot make up my mind finally on the matter before thinking more about it. I cannot meet your argument, but how is it that though, as you say, we know ourselves in every act of knowledge, we do not always think "I am seeing," "I am hearing?"

Maitreyi.—"We do not indeed think these words, but their purport is always present in our consciousness. I heard often from the Muni in my father's house, before my marriage, that there could be no knowledge without self-knowledge, however dim and crude it might be."

Katyayani.—"I too heard all this from him before, but did not understand it, nor do I see now, even though I understand it, its relation to the main subject of our conversation."

Maitreyi.—"The connection is this: you said, after you had defined the Self for the second time, that the Self might know either sensuous objects or itself. You now see that knowing the Self is the fundamental, essential knowledge, since in knowing sensuous objects also, we know the Self, and we know it even when we do not know the former."

Katyayani.—"Then it seems there are two kinds of knowledge, the knowledge of Self, which is constant, and the knowledge of sensuous objects, which is changeful."

Maitreyi.—"Why do you call the knowledge of objects changeful?"

Katyayani.—"Because it is not always present with us. When I see the Muni, I do not always see you; and when I see you, the Muni may be absent from me."

Maitreyi.—"But the knowledge of objects unseen and forgotten recur to us. Things that I knew yesterday and forgot, I know again to-day, and remember them to be the same objects I knew yesterday. Does not this show that the knowledge of objects is as permanent as the knowledge of the Self?"

Katyayani.—"But the knowledge of objects go and come, while the knowledge of the Self is constant."

Yajnavalkya.—"With the passing away of the knowledge of a particular object, our knowledge of the Self "as the knower of that object" also passes away. In this way the knowledge of

the Self is seen to be as changeful as that of objects."

Maitreyi.—"But in knowing a fresh object I know myself as the same Self that knew other objects before, so that self-knowledge in both the acts is constant."

Yajnavalkya.—"In the case cited by you, the knowledge of objects is as constant as self-knowledge. In knowing the unity of the Self in two succeeding acts of knowledge, the objects of knowledge in the two acts must be brought together in thought."

Maitreyi.—"But in dreamless sleep we forget objects altogether, but we know the Self nevertheless."

Yajnavalkya.—"If we forget the world, we forget the Self also, that is, we do not know ourselves. When we know ourselves again, we know objects also. What we usually call self-knowledge is as inconstant and subject to lapse as the knowledge of objects."

Maitreyi.—"I am now in greater confusion than I ever was. From what you say everything seems to be hopelessly changeable and even destructible."

The Self can exist only as a knower. But if we lose self-knowledge and the knowledge of objects in dreamless sleep, how does the Self exist? On the other hand, if knowledge is suspended in dreamless sleep, how does it re-appear in the waking state?"

Yajñavalkya.—"Your confusion arises from confounding the real Self (*atman*) with the sensorium (*manas*), which is in a sense one with the Self, and in another different from it. The changes in question are changes not of the Self, but of the *manas*."

Katyayani.—"What is the *manas*? And how is it both one with and different from the *atman*?"

Yajñavalkya.—"The changes we have been speaking about must be said to be the change of something. They must be the states of a substance. That substance is not the Self, for everything exists permanently in the Self, as you see from the re-appearance of everything in the waking state. We therefore imagine—and cannot but imagine—another substratum for these changes and call it the *manas*. In this respect the *manas* is different from the *atman*. But we must think

of everything as necessarily related to the Self and forming a part, as it were, of the *atman*. In this respect, then, the *manas* as the substratum of everything is one with the *atman*."

Maitreyi.—"Ah! I see now. How my doubts are cleared! In that great assembly you described the Self as the Inner-Ruler (*antaryamin*) of all things. In naming different objects as examples you named the *manas* as one. I remember your very words. You said: '*Yo manasi tishthan manasohntara, yan mano na veda, yasya manah sariram, yo manohntaro yamayatyasha ta atman-taryamyamritah*.'* (He who, though existing in the *manas*, is yet different from the *manas*, whom the *manas* does not know, whose body the *manas* is, who, existing in the *manas*, rules it—he is your Self, the Inner-Ruler, the Immortal.) That the Self is the Ruler of the earth, of water, fire, and such other objects, I understood very well; but that like other objects, the *manas* also is unknowing, dependent and ruled by the Self, I did not understand then, but I understand this now."

*The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, III. 7.

Katyayani.—"Should we not stop here to-night? It is getting late."

Maitreyi.—"The answer to my question is yet as far as ever. It is only your question that has been answered. We have seen that the Self is conscious by nature and that its consciousness is constant, unchangeable. We have also seen that it is different from the *manas*. My question is, how do we know that the same Self is in all? We seem to have a distinct Self in every one of us."

Yajnavalkya.—"When you know the real Self, you will know it is necessarily one and infinite. The distinction between finite selves are not distinctions in the pure, infinite Self, but in the cognitional Self (*vijnanatman* or *vijnanam*):"

Katyayani.—"What do you mean by the *vijnanatman* or *vijnanam*?"

Maitreyi.—"I also have to know this. In your exposition of the *Antaryamin* in the great assembly you distinguished the *Atman* as well from the *vijnanam* as from the *manas*. I have understood the difference between the *Atman* and the *Manas*, but I don't see what difference there is between the *Atman* and the *vijnanam*."

Katyayani.—"How do you remember so many things? Perhaps you can repeat the Muni's very words?"

Maitreyi.—"Yet, I can. But I deserve little credit for this; for, in order to make his exposition impressive the Muni used almost the same words in every part of it. About the *vijnanam*, he said: *Yo vijnane tishthan vijnanadantaro, yam vijnanam na veda, yasya vijnanam sariram, yo vijnanamantara yamayatyasha ta atmantaryamyamritah.*' (He who, though existing in the *vijnanam*, is yet different from the *vijnanam*, whom the *vijnanam* does not know, whose body the *vijnanam* is, who, existing in the *vijnanam*, rules it, he is your Self, the Inner-Ruler, the Immortal.) I now wish to know how the *vijnanam* is distinguished from the pure Self.

Katyayani.—"Tell us first what the *vijnanam* is, and how we know that there is such a thing in every one of us."

Yajnavalkya.—"I should be very glad to explain everything to you, but it would be very late before you would find any satisfaction from my exposition. Are you prepared to sit on?"

Maitreyi.—"I am quite prepared. I can sit up the whole night."

Katyayani.—"I can't say the same thing of me. I already feel tired and sleepy."

Maitreyi.—"Why not go to rest and let me talk a little longer with the Muni? I shall tell you to-morrow what we talk about."

Katyayani.—"I shall not be satisfied unless I hear every word. And so better stop here and go to rest. Besides, I have got something else to talk about with the Muni before I sleep."

Maitreyi took the hint and let her co-wife retire with her husband, while she, as was her habit, sat meditating in the *Tapogriha* till a late hour on all that she had heard from the sage. The sage's bodily presence was with *Katyayani*, but his spirit remained with *Maitreyi*.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE UNIVERSAL SELF.

NEXT evening the discussion was resumed, the sage himself opening it thus:—"You can very well see that the unity of the *Atman* will be clear if it can be shown that what every one of us call our Self, is also the Self of the world. But how can we know that the individual and the universal Self are identical? As I told you yesterday, the real Self, the Self of the universe, has only to be known, to be recognised as one, undivided. It is because people don't know it that they don't recognise it as one in all persons and things. Let me see whether you have any knowledge of *Paramatman* or he is to you only an object of belief, as he is to most people."

Maitreyi.—"I have often heard that everything is Brahman, and I have a vague notion that whatever we know at any moment, we know along with it the universal Self in which it exists.

But I don't know how far I shall be able to explain my notion."

Katyayani.—"Try to explain it as much as you can."

Yajnavalkya.—"Our yesterday's conversation will help us. Tell me whether you know anything else in knowing this room."

Maitreyi.—"In knowing the room I know my Self as knowing it."

Yajnavalkya.—"But you know that the room exists in the universal Self or rather believe that it does so?"

Maitreyi.—"Yes, I believe it, but do not understand it."

Yajnavalkya.—"You will understand it by and by. Tell me now if you have any other notion of the room than as a *known* thing."

Maitreyi.—"It is a known thing now. But it may sometimes remain unknown."

Yajnavalkya.—"Does it remain exactly as it is now when it is unknown?"

Maitreyi.—"It remains exactly the same."

Yajnavalkya.—"But it is *known* now—seen, touched, or both. Does it continue to be all this?"

Maitreyi.—"It must. But I see that in saying that a known thing continues to be exactly what it is even when unknown, I contradict myself."

Yajnavalkya.—"You certainly do, and so do all who do not know the world as it really is."

Maitreyi.—"Then I see I must say that the room must always be conceived as known."

Katyayani.—"But suppose we say that the room, when unknown, retains its other properties, but changes only its *knownness*."

Maitreyi.—"How could that be? All the properties of the room are *known* properties. The room, with all its properties, is a known thing and I see we have no other notion of it than as a known thing."

Yajnavalkya.—"Then you must think of the room as always known by you? You have no other notion of it, you say."

Maitreyi.—"Not necessarily by me. It may be known by others."

Yajnavalkya.—"But it is in your knowledge now."

Maitrēyi.—"Yes, it is."

Yajnavalkya.—"Every part of it is in your consciousness?"

Maitreyi.—"Yes, every part is in my consciousness."

Yajnavalkya.—"And your consciousness is your Self?"

Maitreyi.—"Yes."

Yajnavalkya.—"Then, the room is in your Self, or your Self is in the room?"

Maitreyi.—"So it would seem."

Yajnavalkya.—"And the room will always be as you now know it?"

Maitreyi.—"Certainly."

Yajnavalkya.—"That is, it will continue to be in your Self or your Self will continue in it even when your body is away?"

Maitreyi.—"I see I must admit all this, but how strange it seems!"

Yajnavalkya.—"The strangeness results from the fancy which people have that when they know things, they bring their Self to those things and take their Self away from them when they are absent from them, whereas the fact is that in knowing things we discover the Self in them, the

Self which contains or *sustains* the things, and which is common to them and us."

Maitreyi.—"How much I learn from these few words of yours!"

Katyayani.—"You say that, in knowing things, we *discover* the Self in them. It, therefore, exists in them even before we know it in them?"

Yajnavalkya.—"Certainly it does."

Katyayani.—"And as such it is the *Visvatman* (the cosmic Self)?"

Yajnavalkya.—"Yes, as such it is the *Visvatman*."

Maitreyi.—"And is it also the *Sutratman* (the thread or binding Self) that you spoke of at the great assembly?"

Yajnavalkya.—"Yes, it is also the *Sutratman* that I spoke of; but my exposition of the *Sutratman* in the great assembly was rather superficial."

Maitreyi.—"Explain it to us more clearly now."

Yajnavalkya.—"You are already on the way to understanding it. Think and say how it binds together things."

Maitreyi.—"It binds together me and the things I know; it is both in me and in them. It is both the Self in them and my own Self. How agreeably surprised am I to see that I am obliged to repeat almost your own words in the assembly!"

Katyayani.—"How does it bind together you and me?" How can I know that my Self is your Self?"

Maitreyi.—"In knowing the world you know that the *Visvatman* is the same as your *Atman*. My knowledge of the world reveals to me the unity of my Self with the Self of the world. It therefore follows that the Self in you and me is the same."

Katyayani.—"I see. But there are differences also between you and me. How to explain these?"

Yajnavalkya.—"They will be explained when I explain the *Vijnanatman*. Now tell me what more you know about the *Sutratman*."

Maitreyi.—"The *Sutratman* seems to bind together different parts of space. In knowing and thinking of different parts of space as connected,

I know them and think of them as existing in one knowing Self."

Yajnavalkya.—"And you know that all parts of space are connected, particular spaces being contained in one, undivided space."

Maitreyi.—"I know it, and does it not follow from it that the *Visvatman* or *Sutratman* is one and undivided?"

Yajnavalkya.—"Certainly it does. How wonderfully you follow up my hints! The *Visvatman*, you see, is in all space, or rather all space is in him. In other words, he is beyond space, that is, beyond the divisions of space. But please go on."

Maitreyi.—"It seems to me, again, that the Universal Self binds together different periods of time, for it is the unchanging witness of events following one another."

Yajnavalkya.—"Quite so and you see therefore that the Universal Self is beyond time or eternal."

Katyayani.—"Do you mean that he is eternal, because he does not change? Whose are the changes in Nature, then?"

Maitreyi.—"All changes are changes of *manas*."

Katyayani.—"But the *manas* in us is limited. Cosmic changes cannot be its changes."

Yajnavalkya.—"We must suppose, therefore, you see, a cosmic *manas* as the substratum of cosmic changes."

Katyayani.—"But does not the Universal Self change when he knows cosmic events?"

Yajnavalkya.—"Knowledge is not a change, but a permanent property of the Self. As Maitreyi said, the Universal Self is the unchanging Witness of events. The knowledge of events is not itself an event. From this it follows that the knowledge of events exists in the Universal Self even before and after the happening of events. To him there is no distinction of, 'now' and 'then,' as there is no distinction of, 'here' and 'there.'"

Maitreyi.—"And therefore it is that things that pass out of our minds and remain absent from us for a time, come back to us and show that they existed all the while."

Katyayani.—"But is not our knowledge a change? When I know this room, I pass from the state of ignorance to that of knowledge, and so there is a change."

Maitreyi.—"But the knowledge of the room exists in the Universal Self even before we know it. To him it is not an act but a property, or his very nature."

Yajnavalkya.—"Of him it cannot be said that he knows, but only that he is knowing.* He is *akarta*, *nishkriya*, non-agent, non-active."

Katyayani.—"But what happens when we know the room or any other thing? Does not my Self act then? Is not its knowledge an action?"

Yajnavalkya.—"Here you come in sight of the *vijnanatman*. The Universal Self, as universal, does not act, does not change. The knowledge of everything and every event exists in him as his very essence. But when, in some mysterious way he differentiates, as it were, a part of his essence as an individual Self, this individual Self appears as an agent, as knowing something it did not know before, as coming to know itself from a state of ignorance of itself. The Universal Self as such a differentiated individual is called the *vijnanatman*. In essence, it is identical with the Universal, but as knowing the contents of the Universal

* The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV 3. 22—30.

in parts, in particular spaces and times, it is as it were different from the Universal."

Maitreyi.—"Your exposition leaves nothing to be desired. I have no more doubts at present to be resolved. The difficulty lies in shaking off our preconceived notions. One of the most hardened of these notions is that in the world, we have only sensuous objects, that, in knowing the world we know only such objects, unrelated to any Self. But you made it clear to us in yesterday's conversation that whatever we may know, we *necessarily know* the Self along with it, that nothing can be known apart from the Self. To-day's conversation has made it clear to me that we cannot *think* of objects apart from the Self—that when we think of objects we really think of them as related to the Self or in the Self. The conclusion also is clear and irresistible that we really *believe* the world to be in the Self and cannot possibly believe otherwise, though we make a strange mistake in giving expression to our belief, as I did when I said that I could think of the room as existing unknown."

Katyayani.—"How you gather together in

brief all the threads of the argument and help my dull intellect to grasp its drift! What could I have done without you?"

Maitreyi.—(She could not bear to be praised and was annoyed at it.) "You must not quarrel with me, specially at such a moment. Say rather if you have got any difficulties to be removed."

Katyayani.—"I was just saying that you had helped me in my difficulty by putting the argument in a nut-shell—'We *know* the world in the Self, we *think* the world in the Self, and therefore we cannot but *believe* the world to be in the Self. A Self-less world, I see, is something which we neither know, nor think nor really believe. We only *speak* of it—it is something made merely of words—*bacharambhanam**—as the theologians say. I now understand what they mean by the phrase.'"

Yajnavalkya.—"I am very glad to see, Katyayani, that you have got the clue to the whole thing. What more have you to ask now?"

Maitreyi.—"I was speaking of the difficulty of shaking off preconceived notions. I have men-

* The *Chhandogya Upanishad*, Chap. VI.

tioned one of them. The other is that we habitually think of the Self in us as a small thing and cannot get ourselves to think that it is as large as the world, or rather larger than the world, for it transcends time and space. But you have given us the clue to the removal of this difficulty also. You have shown that our Self has two characters, universal and individual. As universal, as the *Paramatman*, it is infinite and comprises everything; as individual, as the *Vijñanatman*, it is finite, it knows only a part of the universe. This distinction immensely helps me in my difficulties. In individualising himself as the *Vijñanatman*, the Infinite draws a cordon, as it were, round a part of his knowledge, and thereby practically limits himself. When I think of the matter in this way I understand; though only indistinctly, why I, though one in essence with the Infinite, am so ignorant and powerless. But our habitual belief that we are independent of the Infinite, is very difficult to shake off."

Yajñavalkya.—"You will find it easier to shake it off if you remember two more things. One is that the cordon you speak of is widened ever and

anon as we know things unknown to us before. This continual widening of the cordon shows us afresh now and again that we are one with the Universal Self and in constant communion with him. The other thing to be constantly thought of is dreamless sleep which, by suspending our seemingly independent existence and drawing us back into the Infinite, constantly reminds us of our entire dependence on him."

Maitreyi.—"These hints are very valuable and will be of great help to me."

Katyayani.—"Have we not got enough for to-day, and should we not retire now?"

Maitreyi.—"We have got enough not only for to-day, but for many a day. But I cannot go to bed now. I must, before I do that, think of the strange things I have heard from the Muni and try to understand them as much as I can. You have my permission, if it were at all needed, to retire with the Muni."

Katyayani and the sage retired. Maitreyi sat on meditating as usual; but something unusual happened that night. Meditating on the lines laid down by her preceptor, she obtained a direct

vision of the Infinite and Eternal, and her soul was filled with the joys of direct communion with the Divine Being. She felt, even at the first touch of these joys, that they were incomparable to the pleasures of the world even in their intensest form. Henceforward she pursued these joys with an unshaken constancy and gradually purged her soul of those worldly desires that obstruct our progress and our final liberation and union with the Eternal. When her husband retired from the world at an advanced age, she was so much free from worldly desires, that, as we read,* she declined any share in his worldly goods and wished only to have instruction on immortality, declaring: "What shall I do with that by which I cannot become immortal. What you know of that, Sir, please explain to me clearly."

* In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, II. 4, and IV. 5.

CHAPTER V.

THE SCHOOL AT JANAKPUR.

WE have seen something of Yajnavalkya as a husband and the preceptor of his wives.

We shall now have a glimpse—nothing more than a glimpse—of him as a public teacher. His fame as a teacher of the Vedas had brought such a large number of Vedic students to him that he could not board them in his own house, as was the custom in those days. He had a large boarding house built for them, with the king's munificent help, near his own house. The students lived there under the immediate care of Yajnavalkya's assistants, while he superintended the arrangements and taught his pupils at stated hours. The scholars belonged to all the three 'twice-born' castes and were gathered from all ranks of society, including princes of royal blood on the one hand and sons of common traders, artisans, and farmers on the other. But all were treated alike and had the same comforts.

hardships and duties. They had the same kind of food, the same kind of bedding, and the same kind of athletic sports except in the case of those who, in addition to their academic studies, received training as warriors. The rigours of the modern distinction of castes were unknown. The students all ate and drank together and behaved with one another as perfect equals. The division of professions indeed made caste marriages the general order of the day, but inter-cast marriages were frequent specially those of the *anuloma* class—that between a male of a higher caste and a female of lower caste. The *pratiloma* kind—that between a higher caste female and a lower caste male, was less frequent, but by no means unknown. The Kshatriya chiefs, for example, Yayati, had sometimes Brahmana wives, and at the *svayamvaras* of Kshatriya girls, caste restrictions were systematically disregarded. So that, among the students of the different castes in Yajnavalkya's school, many were related to one another by both blood and marriage, and the foundation of many a relationship was being laid in the warm, youthful friendships that grew up, as in a fertile soil, under a

common hospitable roof.

Though Yajnavalkya's name is specially connected with the *Yajurveda*, he was well versed in all the three Vedas, *Rik*, *Saman* and *Yajus*, that were taught in those ancient days, and gave lessons in all the three. There were also 'chairs,' as we would now say, for all the six *Vedangas* in his school. But naturally, Yajnavalkya's lectures on the *Shukla Yajurveda* attracted more pupils than those on the other Vedas or *Vedangas*. One morning, several years after Yajnavalkya's marriage with Maitreyi, he was teaching the *Shukla Yajurveda* to a class of about a hundred pupils when something happened which has a bearing on what we shall say in our next chapter, and which therefore we must relate now.

Yajnavalkya had lectured for about half an hour when he was somewhat disturbed by a deep rumbling of carriage-wheels at the gate of the school-house. Almost immediately after, the porter presented himself to the teacher and announced the arrival, in his big chariot drawn by four horses, of 'the General accompanied by a fine young man.' The General was no other than our

old friend, Yajnadatta, already introduced to the reader as one of the two Kshatriyas who saved Yajnavalkya's life. During the years that had followed that event, he had by his many virtues, specially by his military skill and heroism, risen in the king's favour and been promoted, by gradual steps, to the highest military post at His Majesty's disposal—that of the Commander-in-Chief of his vast army. But what has brought this high military functionary to the door of the Vedic teacher this morning? Let us learn this from the conversation that followed upon the meeting of the two friends:—

Yajnadatta.—"My revered friend, I am sorry to disturb you in your duties. But I have come on a business which has some relation to your holy function."

Yajnavalkya.—"I don't mind the interruption in the least. Apart from the great pleasure of seeing a friend like you, the transition is very easy from uttering the holy texts to looking at a face shining with the glory of holy wisdom. But whom have you got with you here? (looking directly at the remarkably noble and beautiful

face of the young man who had accompanied the General)."

Yajnadatta.—"It is for him that I come to you. This young man's name is Brahmagupta. He is a son of my honoured friend, Indragupta, the celebrated merchant of Benares, whose name and fame you must have heard. I made his acquaintance when I visited Benares, under the king's orders, about the time of the great assembly. Since that time we have often met, and my family and his have been on the friendliest terms. He has now specially honoured me by sending his favourite son, Brahmagupta, to be trained in our city under my care. He is now eighteen and has already made considerable progress in Vedic studies. But your fame as a Vedic teacher has induced his father to send him here to complete his studies. He is to stop in this boarding house and learn all that he can do from you and your assistants. But he is also to devote a part of his time to learning the arts of war under our honoured friend, Vishnumitra."

The reader must here be told that our friend Vishnumitra had also, like Yajnadatta, risen

high by this time in the king's favour, and was now the *Dhanurpedacharya*, the chief teacher of military arts in the royal military school of Mithila. However, the conversation between the two friends continued uninterrupted.

Yajñavalkya.—"I am glad that Brahmagupta, though a Vaisya, has a liking for arts which are generally thought useful only to a Kshatriya. My opinion is that true wisdom consists, not in merely acquiring professional knowledge, but in learning all that we need for our safety, happiness, and liberation. Hence I feel specially gratified at my brother-in-law, Maitreya's (looking at a handsome-looking and stoutly-built young man standing near him) regularly attending Agnimitra's class in addition to his Vedic studies. [Agnimitra was Vishnumitra's younger brother and had charge of gymnastic exercises in the royal military school. He also taught archery to volunteers.] He may never be in actual need of the arts he is learning, but his exercises are helping him, as you may see, in growing up to be a strong and healthy man (looking again at Maitreya with honest pride)."

Yajnadatta.—"I am very glad to hear of Maitreya's care of his body and his eagerness to learn our Kshatriya arts. I have often met him at his father's house, and at the house of Vishnumitra, in the company of the fine-looking boys of that family, some of the best hopes of our military class. But who knew that the son of a Vedic teacher, and the brother-in-law of another, was growing up to be a warrior in his own way (smiling and looking at Maitreya). What do you say, Maitreya?"

Maitreya.—(Taking the compliment with a bow and a smile.) "I have no mind, Sir, to take up any other profession than my father's, but the story I heard in my childhood of the saving of the life of my venerable teacher by Your Excellency and the Dhanurvedacharya forcibly impressed me with the necessity of learning the arts that are improperly supposed to be necessary only for a Kshatriya, but which every one ought to learn for his own health and safety. What would have become of my teacher, and what might have become of my father, but for Your Excellencies?"


Yajnadatta.—"I am glad to hear of your

motives. In the case of Brahmagupta, however, the learning of military arts is a necessity. He is expected, when he comes of age, to accompany his father's goods of immense value from town to town and country to country, and lead a convoy of archers and swordsmen for the protection of the merchandise from highway robbers. These men, specially those near about the Vindhya hills, are so bold and strenuous fighters, that it sometimes requires the most skilled warriors to vanquish them. Brahmagupta has need to be a good Kshatriya and a good Vaisya in one."

The conversation was interrupted by the sound of a gong near the school gate, announcing that the time for dismissing the classes for the morning was very near. The friends stopped talking and went through a little business. Brahmagupta was duly admitted as a scholar; and the General took a hasty look at his bed and the other arrangements for his accommodation. Inviting him to visit his house as often as would be consistent with his duties as a scholar, the General took leave of his friends in the school and returned to his carriage.

CHAPTER VI.

ARYAN AND NON-ARYAN.

 **EVEN** years have passed after the events described in the last chapter. The boys of that time have grown up to be men, and the girls women. Yajnavalkya's Vedic school, and Vishnumitra's military academy, have sent out ruling chiefs, ministers, judges, soldiers and men of business to the world. Maitreya is already assisting his father as a teacher of the Vedas and preparing to take up his work in full. Brahmagupta has completed his Vedic studies and military training at Janakpur and returned to Benares to take up his father's work. But he takes every occasion to visit the city, where the best years of his life have been spent and where he has friends from whom he cannot remain long separated. His relations with General Yajnadatta's family are specially very close, and he is always a welcome guest there.

About this time the General is preparing to celebrate the *svayamvara* (a bride's choice of a bride-

groom) of his favourite daughter, Ganga. She is now a young woman of twenty, famed all over the Videha country and even beyond its limits for her rare beauty, her intellectual attainments, and the purity and sweetness of her character. She has many acquaintances among the accomplished young men of the city, any one of whom she might marry if she chose. Her hand has been sought by many a king and prince of royal blood, not to speak of others of a lower rank in life. Perhaps she is not without a secret preference for this or that young man in her heart. But neither she nor her father wishes to dispose of her in the ordinary way. It must be in the old orthodox fashion of high-born Kshatriyas. It must be a grand *svayamvara* celebration in which a wager should be laid—some ‘haughty feat of arms’ proposed as the price of the lovely damsel’s hand. In this matter father and daughter were entirely of one mind, and brave and warlike relations of the family—all true to Kshatriya instincts—heartily supported the proposal. So, the preparations were made on a very grand scale—worthy of the rank and fame of the commander of one of the

most powerful armies in ancient India. Invitations were sent out to all reigning chiefs, not excluding even Sudra or Non-Aryan kings, to learned professors and able statesmen, high military officers and wealthy merchants, and a general notice was circulated by beat of drums all over the kingdom, that the lady Gangā would be given away to any one, irrespective of caste and rank, who would achieve the proposed feat of arms. It seems marvellous, in these caste-ridden days, how high-born Kshatriyas could so far forget their rank as to offer their daughters even to men of the lowest ranks in an open *svayamvara*. But apart from the fact that the Kshatriyas were the most liberal, free-thinking and progressive class in ancient India, there seems to have been something deeply philosophical in the idea of the *svayamvaras*, that we read of. The wager laid was usually a very difficult one. The feat thus proposed could be achieved only by the best trained and most skilled men of arms in the country; and if such men were found among people of lower castes, they were virtually Kshatriyas—Kshatriyas by *guna* and *karma*—and

Kshatriya girls, by becoming the wives of such men, did not by any means degrade themselves. Thus seem to have argued the ancient warriors who celebrated *svayamvaras* and thus probably argued Yajnadatta, whose wisdom and scholarship were scarcely less than his heroism and military skill.

The *svayamvara* was to be held in a *villa* of Yajnadatta, about ten miles down the Ganges from Janakpur. A huge amphitheatre for seating the vast concourse of people that was expected to attend the ceremony, was built in an open piece of ground near the *villa*, and the mark to be hit—a slowly revolving wooden peacock—was placed on a long pole at one end of the gallery. A gorgeously painted canopy overspread the huge structure which opened at four entrances strongly guarded. Numerous tents of various sizes and qualities were pitched around the amphitheatre for the accommodation of the guests, so that the whole place looked like a city of camps or the encampment of a vast invading army.

The ceremony was to begin in the early morning of a day fixed for it. But guests from distant

places began to arrive several days before the fixed day and were accommodated in the tents allotted to each. The guests from Janakpur proceeded to the *villa* in the afternoon of the day preceding the ceremony. The young men were specially on the alert and were anxious to reach the place as early as was consistent with decency. There was an additional inducement for an early arrival there : there was some excellent shooting to be got there, the place abounding in wild birds and beasts of various kinds. There were also small settlements of aborigines nestling in the hills here and there—people who had disturbed many a holy sacrifice and killed and carried away many an Arya in days gone by, and who had furnished excellent targets for the arrows of young men such as we are now dealing with. Even at the time we speak of, Aryan settlements in many parts of the country were subject to the depredations of these savages. But the neighbourhood of a great city, and specially the fame of Janaka as a most powerful kind, had cowed down the hillmen and made them almost forget the taste of Aryan blood and the enjoyment of Aryan wealth. In

return for their apparent mildness, Janaka had left such people, wherever they were found in his dominions, in the quiet possession of their mountain refuges and the peaceful pursuit of their primitive ways of hunting and fish-catching. So that the sport-loving young men, who had just arrived at Yajnadatta's *villa*, had no mind to include them among the animals they meant to shoot in the evening preceding the *svayamvara* day.

But fate had ordained otherwise, as we shall see by and by. The city people, just arrived wandered in groups over and about the *svayamvara* grounds, observing with curiosity every arrangement made for the ceremony and enjoying the beautiful scenery in the neighbourhood of the camp-city. A party of young archers, including candidates for the lovely Ganga's hand, were engaged in shooting birds near a hill-side. They were apparently preparing themselves for the difficult task at which they were to try their hands next morning. Maitreya, though not one of the candidates, was in the party. He had his bow with him and had shot a bird or two. But his

mind was evidently not in the sport. He gradually separated himself from the party and walked about aimlessly. He was thinking of a *svayamvara*—not of that which was to come off the next day, but another which it suggested and which might come off any day. It was the possible *svayamvara* of Sarasvati, the beautiful and highly accomplished daughter of Vishnumitra. The thought of that ceremony, though now only a possibility, made his heart beat fast, and drove away the blood from his ruddy face. He knew he could not be a candidate for the damsel's hand. He was a skilled archer, no doubt, but he could not consider himself any way equal to the carefully trained pupils of the Dhanurvedacharya and though a *svayamvara* was open to all, irrespective of caste and rank, the idea of a Vedic teacher competing with professional archers for the hand of a Kshatriya damsel was not quite popular. He could not again expect his father to give his permission to such a competition, though he would have no objection to welcoming a Kshatriya daughter-in-law, specially the daughter of his dear friend, Vishnumitra, if she were given.

away in marriage in the ordinary way. These thoughts made Maitreya very sad, and prudence urged the necessity of slowly bringing down the goddess worshipped by him these many years from the high pedestal of his heart. While thus occupied, whom should he see before him but the very object of his worship, conjured, as it were, by the magic of his intense longings. She was wandering about in the company of a number of girls of her own age and enjoying the lovely scenery around. She may or may not have noticed Maitreya, but anon a bush covered over with wild flowers drew her attention, and she separated from her companions. The pleasure of gathering flowers drew her gradually farther and farther from her friends till a small eminence completely hid her from them. On the other hand, Maitreya continued to move farther and farther at easy steps from the bird-shooters and drew nearer the lady of his heart, though he had no mind to greet her and speak to her. On a sudden the girl gave out a sharp cry, a cry of distress, and Maitreya, on looking up (he was too shy to have gazed at her steadily all the while) saw her seized by a stalwart and fierce-look-

ing hill-man and carried away towards the range of hills visible at a distance. He at once ran towards the giant, shouting angrily all the while, and trying to aim at him, but without success. The arrow intended to bring him down, and arrest his course, might wound or even kill his prey. The only course left to his pursuer was to overtake him by superior speed, and this, therefore, Maitreya tried to do with his utmost efforts. Suddenly he saw the savage lift the poor lady on his shoulders, and folding her, as it were, round his neck, held her arms and feet by his two hands tightly, apparently to put a stop to her struggles to free herself. Maitreya took courage at this movement of his enemy, and aimed an arrow at the lower part of his body. The shaft felled him like a palm-tree with a cluster of ripe fruits on its top. His fair prey got out of his loosened grasp and ran towards her rescuer. Throwing herself on his outstretched arms, she trembled like a dove shot by a hunter, but the soft and sweet touch of a lover, whose bosom she had longed for as eagerly as she had been longed for by him, acted as a balm on her, and she quickly recovered. By this time,


Maitreya's friends, the bird-shooters, had come up, drawn by the lady's screams and her rescuer's shouts, and they were followed by a large number of other people from the camp, all roused to activity by the alarm raised by Sarasvati's companions. All realised the situation at a glance even before Maitreya gave an account of his encounter with the savage, who rolled in a pool of blood at a little distance from the assembled crowd. At the first sight of him a number of armed young men ran to him and the foremost dispatched him with a stroke of his sword. He was not to be the only *asura* killed that evening. A long line of people belonging to the unfortunate race appeared at the top of a hill in the front, and showing by their movements that their intentions were far from friendly, drew towards themselves quite a cloud of arrows from the young infuriated Kshatriyas gathered on the spot. The arrows did their work very effectively, for, of the long line of dark figures, only two or three were visible after the first discharge. Even this did not appease the wrath of the young firebrands. Suspecting that the hamlets seen like white patches on the distant

range of hills before them harboured mischief and conspiracy, they rushed on determined to storm them. But before they had gone more than a few steps, their course was arrested by cries of "Stop, stop." The General himself had come up with a strong party of soldiers. He addressed the young Kshatriyas thus : "My young friends, I pray you to desist for my sake. We, Kshatriyas, should not, indeed, shrink from bloodshed where it is necessary, but the villages yonder have not given us any offence. The assault, which one poor wretch has paid for by his life, may have been only the result of his own foolishness. A few others who seemed to sympathise with him have also met with a more or less deserved death. Let us not have more bloodshed on the eve of a solemn celebration. I place this strong guard of soldiers here. They will be stationed here for the whole of this night and of the coming day, and see that no evil-doers approach the *svayamvara* grounds. I hope this precaution will be enough. For what has actually taken place, we need not be sorry. It seems to me rather auspicious that one *svayamvara* has im-

mediately preceded another." While uttering these words, the General smiled and looked at Maitreya and the young men around him. They too looked at him and at one another, and smiled. They felt that though the General had grown old, his heart was still youthful and in touch with theirs. He had just said what every one's heart was saying inwardly. The lady Sarasvati had anticipated her *svayamvara*, and no one after this thought of any other *svayamvara* for her than what had actually taken place in the manner aforesaid. However, I now proceed to describe Ganga's *svayamvara*.

CHAPTER VII.

A SVAYAMVARA.

 HE next day, the day fixed for the ceremony, dawned with the inspiring sound of bugles, drums, and other musical instruments, and every Kshatriya heart leaped with joy in expectation of seeing a spectacle full of interest and excitement. There had been little quiet and sleep in the camp during the previous night, and long before the day broke streams of people began to pour in from the city—people who had not come on the previous day. Before the day was an hour old, the huge amphitheatre was filled to its utmost capacity. The sight that presented itself was one of the gayest and most gorgeous ever seen. At one end of the wide space of ground, enclosed by the gallery, stood a newly erected throne, and thereon sat Janaka, the King of the Videhas, with his ministers and counsellors ranged around him. Opposite to him, at the other end of

the open space, was the platform for the competitors to stand on, and near it stood the *lakshya*—the wooden peacock—surmounted on a long pole and revolving slowly by means of a simple machinery. The mark to be hit was one of the eyes of the artificial bird. Half of the upmost part of the gallery was occupied by the numerous foreign chiefs and princes that had come either as competitors or spectators in response to the General's invitation. The other half was occupied by the ladies, among whom shone, like the moon among the stars, the lovely damsel who was to-day the object of longing to so many hearts. The gorgeous and many-coloured dresses of the ladies and the chiefs, and the glittering arms of the latter, seemed to rival in their brightness the light of the rising sun. The other parts of the amphitheatre were occupied by an immense crowd of all castes and ranks of society, gathered from all parts of the king's dominions and from neighbouring as well as remote outlying kingdoms. A flourish of bugles and trumpets announced the hour for the commencement of the ceremony. The military music ceased and was followed by the

more soft and solemn music of the Hotris, the Adhvaryus and the Udgatris, the priests who successively chanted *Rik*, *Yajus* and *Saman* verses. Then, by the king's order, the herald stood up and announced on behalf of the bride's father, the purpose and nature of the *svayamvara*, declaring that the lady Ganga would accept as her husband any one, whether he was a Brahmana, a Kshatriya, a Vaisya or a Sudra, who would succeed in hitting the mark—one of the eyes of the artificial, revolving peacock. A lull followed the announcement. The wager seemed extremely difficult, and even the most skilled bowmen seemed to hesitate. The silence was broken by the jingling of the arms of a king, who rose from his seat on the uppermost gallery and came down with slow, dignified steps. All eyes were fixed on him, and a suppressed whisper of inquiry and expectation ran through the whole assembly. The candidate's name and rank were not announced; it was only his crowned head that showed he was a ruling chief. It was not necessary, when a wager was laid in a *svayamvara*, to introduce the candidates to the bride or to the audience. This was done only

when there was no wager.* I, therefore, shall not do what the herald himself left undone. Let the candidates go unknown till we come to the last and successful candidate. I need hardly say that the chief who led the tournament failed to hit the mark. He was followed by nineteen more unsuccessful heroes, including several kings and princes of royal blood, military officers and private soldiers, Brahmana, and Kshatriya teachers of archery and even a few Sudra chiefs and warriors. There was again a short lull when the first twenty candidates had failed. Then arose Vishnumitra, the Dhanurvedacharya of Janakpur, not to compete for the prize, but to lead and direct his pupils, ten in number, who had all been sitting at his feet and had urged him to stand by them, and cheer and instruct them when they should rise and take up the difficult task before them. Duty and interest both had induced him to consent. The glory of a pupil of his, if he could succeed, would be partly his. One by one, therefore, the young men rose and

* For *svayamvara* of these two kinds, see Draupadi's and Damayanti's *svayamvara* in the *Mahabharat*.

took their stand by him and listened to his directions before they let their arrows fly. His directions were, in effect, the following: "Fix your eyes on the bird, let the rest of the scene disappear from you. Measure the time the eyes of the bird take to turn to you, in its revolution, and the time that would take your arrow to it. Let fly your shaft before the eye to be hit is visible, equalising mentally the course to be run by it, and the time the eye takes to come in front of you. I shall not tell you when to shoot, that would be unfair. You should know the right moment yourself." Notwithstanding such precise directions, nine of the last band of competitors, including one Brahmana, seven Kshatriyas and one Vaisya, failed to hit the mark. Some of them went very near it, their arrows touching and grazing one of the eyes of the bird and then flying away. Then arose the last, and, as it happened, the successful candidate. It was no other than our friend, Brahmagupta, whom, as the reader might imagine without being told, the announcement of the *svayamvara* had brought to Janakpur from his

home at Benares. He was a well-known figure in the capital of Videha, and his great skill in archery was known to all. He had distinguished himself in his student days in many a tournament and carried away many a prize. His great wealth and munificence, since he had taken up his father's business, were also widely known, and he was held in great esteem by all who knew him in Janakpur. All eyes were fixed on him, therefore, when he handled his bow and stood up before the mark, and expectations ran high, there being no doubt in many minds that he would succeed. His teacher said: "Don't shoot, my boy, before you have concentrated your mind fully on the mark." After a few moments, when all were silent, the teacher asked the boy: "Tell me now what you see." "I see only the bird, the spectators have disappeared from my eyes," answered Brahmagupta. "Very well," said the teacher; "don't shoot yet, wait a bit more." After another interval of silence, the teacher asked: "What do you see now?" "I see only the bird's eyes, turning to and away from me," replied Brahmagupta. "All right," replied the

teacher, take the measurements and shoot at the right moment." A few moments more, and the boy let his arrow fly. It entered the left eye of the peacock and went out through the right, and every one saw the bird revolving with the arrow piercing its eyes. A roar of applause arose from the great assembly, and the sound of bugles, trumpets and other instruments filled the air. Before the noise had ceased, the lovely Ganga descended the steps of the gallery, accompanied by her companions, and placed a rich garland of the most beautiful flowers round the victor's neck and greeted him as her chosen husband. The enthusiasm of the crowd knew no bounds. It was past noon when the cheers and congratulations ceased and the amphitheatre was cleared.

Ganga's marriage followed immediately, and at the end of the festivities the General offered his *villa*, with the encampment that had been temporarily added to it, to his friend, the Dhanurvedacharya, for use in celebrating the marriage of his daughter, Sarasvati. I need not describe the rejoicings that took place on both these occasions, nor follow up the career of the young people who

had just entered life. I may only mention for the sake of the less informed reader, that Maitreya did not become any the less a Brahmana for marrying a Kshatriya lady, and that Brahmagupta was neither raised nor lowered by marrying Yajnadatta's daughter, but remained what he was before, a respected Vaisya or merchant. Nor did the issues of these marriages become anything else than Brahmins and Vaisyas. Caste distinctions were not in those days what they are now.

I shall close my story with a few words on Maitreyi, after whom I have named it. I need hardly say that she, with Yajnavalkya and Katyayani, was present at the festivities referred to and took the heartiest interest in them. She continued to discuss philosophical subjects with her husband till, as I have already said, he retired to the forest at an advanced age. He left his eldest son, who had then grown up and entered life, in charge of his family. Maitreyi lived on happily, loved and honoured by her co-wife and step-children, and communicating to them, according to their capacities, the light she had received from her husband. She had never any children, and refused, as we

have already seen, any share in her husband's property, when he disposed of it at his retirement. She was therefore enabled to pursue her meditations and other spiritual avocations unhampered by other cares and thus resembled her aunt, Gargi, as much as a married woman could resemble a life-long maiden.

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